

## A Good Investment CIA Gets 'A' on Tests

By Holmes Alexander

WASHINGTON — Among the many things one can find in the Pentagon Papers is a high degree of competence on the part of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in at least three fields. While President Kennedy's reputation suffers from the revelations, the CIA comes through with flying colors — the skull and bones variety.

Back in 1963, the Kennedy Administration decided to bring down the loyal-to-the-USA Ngo Dinh Diem regime because it was known to be corrupt and not to have popular support in South Vietnam. Kennedy naturally turned to the CIA as his executioner.

The CIA did not stage a coup, but it did the next best thing. It kept track of the Vietnamese generals who were conspiring against Diem. The CIA agent on the spot was a certain Lt. Col. Lucien Conein, an old acquaintance of several of the Saigon generals, and he was in close touch with Washington. President Kennedy wanted "plausibility of denial" about U.S. involvement in the upcoming coup. The CIA performed its delicately deceitful role with ruthless precision.

With instructions from JFK, the CIA provided the anti-Diem conspirators with information on the faction that would succeed him.

On October 5, 1963, when President Kennedy wanted to dispatch instructions "with closest security" to the Saigon embassy, he sent them via CIA channels. President Kennedy furthermore ordered that all cloak-and-dagger reports be sent back to him on the same CIA circuit. The coup came off as planned, and the Diem government was replaced by a military junta. (The Diem brothers lost their lives only because they did not accept Ambassador Lodge's invitation of sanctuary at his embassy.)

\*\*\*

While overall instructions from the White House were sometimes ambiguous, according to the published documents, the CIA spooks did their dirty work very well.

As the Vietnamese War was stepped up by the Johnson administration, the CIA took a hard look at the bombing campaign in a report of March 16, 1966, and found that:

"Although the movement of men and supplies in North Vietnam has been hampered and made somewhat more costly (by our bombing), the Communists have been able to increase the flow of supplies and manpower to South Vietnam." The CIA saw the bombing as a failure before others higher up in the administration realized this.

The Pentagon Papers were

certainly not leaked in order to make the CIA look good, but these documents do have that effect. In the James Bond world of kill and conspire (an unnatural and un-American way of life) and in the world of military studies, the agency gets A on most of the tests.

The Pentagon Papers show that the CIA recruited a number of secret armies in Southeast Asia, including an army of Meo tribesmen in Laos. This army was to assist the Royal Laotian Army against the Communists. The secret force has had its ups and downs on the battlefield. Recently, it again was able to capture the strategic Plain of Jars with the help of the U.S. Air Force.

Pravda, in an editorial of 18 July, inadvertently gave the CIA a plug by mentioning the success of the Meo army in Laos. At this writing, the Communists are on the run and are talking peace for a change in Laos. It looks as though the ragtag army of primitive tribesmen is living up to expectations.

\*\*\*

If we accept it as a grisly necessity of world politics, the Central Intelligence Agency, despite its failures, is a good investment and is worth its funding of about \$500-million a year. How do we know? If CIA were not doing a good job, Pravda wouldn't bother to denounce it so hysterically.

STATINTL